

AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE CAUSES
OF THE
INSURRECTION OF THE NEGROES
IN THE ISLAND
OF
ST. DOMINGO.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
OBSERVATIONS
OF

M. GARRAN-COULON

ON THE SAME SUBJECT,
READ IN HIS ABSENCE BY

M. GUADET,

BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,

29th Feb. 1792.

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I N T H E I S L A N D
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S T . D O M I N G O .

AFTER a contest of five years between the Friends of Justice and the African Slave-Dealers, the moral, physical, and political evils of that disgraceful traffick, have been fully developed and ascertained to the kingdom at large. The conviction of truth has been followed by the glow of honest indignation, and the voice of the people has called upon their Legislators, to wash away the national stain. Contradicted in their bold assertions, and refuted in their arguments, the abettors of this trade had almost withdrawn themselves from a struggle, in which their own weapons recoiled upon themselves: for it may justly be remarked, that the most expeditious method of forming an abhorrence of the Slave Trade, is to read the pieces written in its defence.

At this juncture, when nothing remained but for the Representatives of the people to comply with the wishes of their Constituents, in pronouncing the Abolition of this Trade, another, and it is hoped a last attempt is made by its advocates to influence the publick mind:—An in-
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insurrection of the Negroes has taken place in the Island of St. Domingo, and this circumstance is to be adduced as a proof of the dangerous consequences to arise from the proposed measure.—“*Beware,*” say the Partizans of this Trade, “*how you interfere with the concerns of your West Indian Islands—let the example of the French deter you from proceeding a step further in so dangerous a path.*”—But let us be allowed to ask, How far the events that have taken place in St. Domingo apply to the question now before the British House of Commons?—Were these disturbances the consequence of an Abolition of the Trade by the French?—No—Even the eloquence of *Mirabeau* was in this instance ineffectual. Were they the result of any regulations made by the Assembly for the government or relief of the Slaves? No: for the decrees of the Assembly on this subject uniformly purport, *that all regulations on that head should originate with the Planters themselves.* If those dreadful disorders are chargeable to the National Assembly, it is because they did *not* interfere:—because they left the black labourers in the islands at the mercy of their masters; and, after having declared that all mankind were born equal, sanctioned a decree that gave the lie to the first principles of their constitution.

Of the several pieces that have made their appearance on this subject, the address or remonstrance of *the Deputies of St. Domingo to the National Assembly of France*,* calls for particular notice. But before we proceed to an examination into the causes of the enormities it records, let us be permitted a few reflections on the awful scenes that the Island of St. Domingo has of late exhibited: the picture of these outrages forms indeed the most striking part of the narrative in question. The destruction of flourishing plantations; the burning of houses; the slaughter of the

* Translated into English, and published under the title of “*A Particular Account of the Commencement and Progress of the Insurrection of the Negroes in St. Domingo.*” It is scarcely necessary to observe, that its being printed (in France) *by order of the National Assembly*, gives it no additional authenticity; it being a measure always adopted in papers of length, in order to afford the Members an opportunity of considering them.

whites by secret treachery, or open revolt; the gross violations of female chastity; the dissolution of all the bonds of subordination, and all the attachments of society, contribute to fill the dreadful sketch.

Are these enormities to be lamented? they surely are. Can they excite our wonder? by no means. What is the state of the labouring negro? Is he not a being bound down by force? labouring under constant compulsion? driven to complete his task by the immediate discipline of the whip?—Are affection, lenity, and forbearance the result of oppression and abuse? When the native ferocity of Africa is sharpened by the keen sense of long-continued injury, who shall set bounds to its revenge?

Again, how have the fierce dispositions of savage life been counteracted or improved by the example of their white superiors? Resistance is always justifiable where force is the substitute of right: nor is the commission of a civil crime possible in a state of slavery. Yet the punishments that have been devised in the French islands to repress crimes, that could only exist by the abuse of the Slave Holder, are such as nature revolts at. How often have these unfortunate beings beheld their fellows, in famine and distraction, beat the bars of an iron cage, in which they were doomed to pass in inconceivable misery the last days of their existence? Is it not known, that in these wretched islands a human being has resigned his life in the torments of a slow-consuming fire? An unavenged instance of an act so awfully atrocious, marks out for perdition the country that could suffer it. When the oppressor thus enforces his authority, what must be the effects of the sufferer's resentment?

In the forcible violation of female chastity we trace the most detestable extreme of brutality, and, in the estimation of sensibility, the loss of life is preferable to its disgrace; but modesty is not confined to the capacity of a blush, nor sensibility to a particular form and feature. Let this account then be settled between the African Trader, or the imperious Planter, who compels to his embrace the unwilling object of his lust, and the exasperated Slave, who gratifies

gratifies by this hateful act, not his sensuality, but his resentment.

But let us suppose that the sense of shame is incompatible with a black complexion, and that the negro could witness without emotion the gross abuse of the object of his affection; let us suppose too, that the unnatural punishments before mentioned were forgotten, because they were rare; and that the daily discipline of the whip was unheeded, because it was so modified as seldom to be the immediate occasion of death. Yet the Negro had other examples before his eyes. A dissension had arisen amongst the Holders of the Slaves; those who had before united in oppressing them, were now at variance amongst themselves. They had proceeded to open violence; whilst the Slaves waited the event with silence, though not with indifference. One party obtained an early superiority; the leader of the weaker number was taken, and the Negroes were spectators of the death of Ogé, a man who partook of their colour, and who was broken alive upon the wheel. Twenty-five of his followers shared the same fate. If the cold-blooded sons of Europe, educated in the habits of improved society, and affecting to feel the precepts of a mild and merciful religion, can thus forget themselves, and insult their own nature, ought they to wonder that the African should imitate the pattern, and if possible improve upon their example?

Upon this part of the Address reflections still occur, in which the planter is deeply interested—an opinion is there inculcated, that if acceded to and acted upon, must render the islands a constant scene of cruelty and bloodshed. We are told, that the Slaves who had been most kindly treated by their masters, were the soul of the insurrection; that “*it * was they who betrayed and delivered their humane masters to the Assassin’s sword, and seduced and stirred up to revolt the gangs disposed to fidelity.*” Hear this, ye Planters! and if there be one amongst you, so singularly foolish as to harbour a lurking sentiment of humanity, let him, for his own safety, divest himself of it without loss of time!

* Particular Account, p. II.

The Negro is a being, whose nature and dispositions are not merely different from those of the European, they are the reverse of them. Kindness and compassion excite in his breast implacable and deadly hatred: but stripes, and insults, and abuse, generate gratitude, affection, and inviolable attachment! Upon this principle we are enabled to reconcile an apparent inconsistency in the Address.

“ * *Slaves, we are informed, were still found who gave proofs of an invincible fidelity, and who made manifest their determination to detest the seduction of those who would with promises of liberty inveigle them to certain destruction.*” If the humanity of the master only sharpens the appetite of revenge, is it difficult to discover by what mode of treatment the friendship of these Slaves was secured? Be grateful, ye Planters, to the man who has at length disclosed this important truth; and admire his courage, who has dared to avow it, even in the bosom of a nation devoted to liberty!

But the horrors of the slaughter increase. The white father falls a victim to the unnatural rage of his Mulatto son.—Have human crimes their origin and causes in human affairs? or are they incited by some malignant demon, who possessing himself of that cup of affection, the human heart, pours out its contents, and fills it with poison? Alas! we vainly seek in fable the apology of our own depravity; and unhappily the causes of those transactions, which would scarce meet credibility on any other part of the globe, are in these regions of guilt too apparent. However the *Author of Nature* may have instilled affection into the breast of a parent, as the means of preserving the race from destruction, we must allow that the corresponding sentiment in the mind of the offspring, is merely the effect of a long continued course of care, partiality, and tenderness. Shall the harvest then rise up without seed? and where no fondness has been shown, shall filial attachments be expected? In a country where it is by no means unusual for the known children of the Planter to undergo all the hardships, and the ignominy of Slavery, in common with the most degraded class

of mortals, is it there we are to seek for instances of filial affection?

In thus endeavouring to unfold the primary and ever active causes of these troubles, let it not be thought that I wish to palliate the enormities committed by the insurgents: enormities deeply to be deplored, by every one not totally insensible to the sufferings of humanity. But let it not be forgotten, that to know the origin of the malady is the first step towards an efficacious remedy: should that origin be found in the mistaken conduct of the Planters, it is for them to apply the cure after the accumulated cruelties of ages. Do they wait till the revolted subjects of their oppression set them the first example of magnanimity, lenity, and forbearance?

I come now to a closer examination of the Address in question.

After a long and laboured display of the crimes committed by the insurgents, in which it is to be observed, every instance of vindictive retaliation on the part of the White Inhabitants is cautiously suppressed; the Deputies of the Colonies pour down the whole vial of their collected wrath, on the society established in France for abolishing the Slave Trade, under the name of *Les Amis des Noirs*. If we credit this narrative, the Negroes, before they were seduced and alienated by the efforts of this Society, **“ were provided with every comfort, and with accommodations superior to half the Cottagers in Europe.—Secure in the enjoyment of their proprieties, nursed in time of sickness with an expence and an attachment sought for in vain in the much boasted hospitals of England; protected and respected in the infirmities of age, at ease in respect to their children, their families and their affections;—subjected to a labour calculated according to the strength of each individual;—and, to conclude all,—emancipated, whenever they merited it by important services.”—“ We slept in security, add the Remonstrants, in the midst of men that were become our brethren, and many of us had neither locks nor bars to our houses.”*

* Particular Account, p. 19.

This period of confidence and of felicity, did not, if we may believe the Colonists, satisfy the *Amis de Noirs*, who it seems could not comprehend how emancipation could be the highest reward of merit, where Slavery was a state of happiness.—* “*From the time of the Revolution in France, this Society, it is asserted, or at least some of its members, have given an unbounded loose to their enterprise: all means have seemed to them good, so they might tend to its accomplishment.—The open attack, the deep and studied inuendo, the basest and most despicable calumnies, have been practised to forward their design.*” Such are the charges, again repeated in different parts of the work, brought against the Advocates for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in France, and which the abettors of that traffick in England, are desirous of transferring at this critical juncture, to the friends of that important measure here.

The prelude of the Remonstrants is striking, their accusation is boldly made.—The punishments due to the authors of such outrages will be willingly conceded. However they may disguise from the world, or from themselves, their real motives, under the mask of philanthropy, they cannot escape the indignation of their countrymen; and the treachery of the means they employ, fairly marks out the criminality of the end at which they aim.

One thing only is wanting to charge with this criminality the *Amis de Noirs*, and this the Remonstrance does not supply—the proof that they have adopted that course of conduct imputed to them by the Colonists. This defect cannot be compensated, either by the atrocity of the crime, or the virulence and audacity of the accusation.

Had the Society in France been the cause of the disorders in the Colonies, where was the difficulty, where the impropriety, of laying the proofs of it before the Assembly and the World? Was it necessary to keep any terms with men, who had shewn that they had aimed at nothing less than the extirpation of the Colonies? Certain, however, it is, that all we can collect on this head from

* Particular Account, p. 22.

the publication in question, instead of attaching the imputation on the society, evidently proves, that the disorders *had a different cause*.—A cause, which it is as evident the Remonstrants did not dare to avow.

Slight however, as these pretended indications of guilt may appear, they ought not to pass unnoticed. They bear with them their own refutation. Like the giants that warred against heaven, every stone thrown by these champions of oppression, seems destined to return with double weight upon their own heads.

The Society, say the Deputies, * *take hold of the Declaration of the Rights of Man: this immortal work, beneficial to enlightened men, but inapplicable, and therefore dangerous to our regulations, they send with profusion into our Colonies. The journals in their pay or under their influence, give this declaration vent in the midst of our gangs. The writings of the AMIS des NOIRS, openly announce, that the freedom of the Negroes is proclaimed by the Declaration of Rights.*

Miserable effects of injustice, rapacity, and oppression! In the evidence of their own freedom, the Colonists of St. Domingo read their own condemnation. That assertion of the universal rights of Man, which if true at all ought to be as general as day-light, was in the wretched islands of America, destined to give a candle-like light in the residence of the Planter, whilst the poor and destitute Negro was to sit in darkness in his hut.

The declaration of the Rights of Man, was it seems, sent with profusion into the Colonies, but the declaration of the Rights of Man, was not the work of the *Amis des Noirs*; whatever might be its effects, they were not therefore answerable for its consequences. As a constituent part of the dominions of France, the laws of Frenchmen, were properly transmitted to St. Domingo. But it appears from no evidence, but the assertions of the deputies, that the *Amis des Noirs* were more active than others in furnishing the island with a work, which the Colonists in the same breath, execrate and applaud; which they regard

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* Particular Account, p. 22.

as the charter of their own liberty, and the cause of all their distresses.

But again, the writings of the Amis des Noirs, it is said, openly announce, *that the freedom of the Negroes is proclaimed by the Declaration of Rights*. If the Amis des Noirs have made so insipid a comment, they have miserably mispent their time. Is it necessary to prove, that the sun shines when the dial marks the hour? If all men be born equally free, let the Colonists prove the Negroes are not men, and the dispute will settle itself. Is the voice of nature and of truth to be for ever silent, because the Colonists choose to hold in subjection some unfortunate natives of Africa?

Such however, are the proofs, and such their authenticity, upon which the accusations against the society are founded. This defect is attempted to be remedied, by adverting to some expressions, which, in the many and violent debates that have agitated the National Assembly on this subject, have marked the virtuous indignation of its members—* “ *Perish the Colonies rather than we should betray our principles,*” said one of the representatives. “ *Perish the Colonies,*” became indeed, † “ *the signal of blood and conflagration,*” but not amongst the Negroes—it was the Planters who severed these words from their context, and made them the apology of their own enormities. “ *Be just, and eat grass;*” said the Abbé Gregoire. “ *We choose rather to be unjust, and live in luxury,*” the Colonists reply.

I shall not detain my reader by a longer review of these unfounded calumnies, I hasten to a more important task, that of tracing the disturbances of St. Domingo to their

* “ With indecent affectation they have dared to reproach a friend of humanity, with having said, “ *Perish the Colonies rather than a principle should be sacrificed;*” and they dare themselves to say, “ *Perish the Colonies rather than we should grant to the People of Colour the rights of active citizens.*”

Speech of Mr. Guadet, 6th Dec. 1791.

† Particular Account, p. 25.

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origin, and pursuing their progress. If developed with truth, they will be the most effectual answer to the accusations of the Deputies. Let me, however, first be allowed to render more specific, an assertion I have before made.—*It is to the white Colonists alone, we are to attribute the misfortunes of the Colonies.* * “ You have heard of enormities that freeze you with horror! but Phalaris spoke not of his brazen bull, he lamented only the daggers that his own cruelty had raised against him. The Colonists have related instances of ferocity; but give me, said Mirabeau, an uninformed brute, and I will soon make him a ferocious monster.—It was a white, who first plunged a Negro into a burning oven,—who dashed out the brains of a child in the presence of its father,—who fed a Slave with his own proper flesh.—These are the monsters that have to account for the barbarity of the revolted Savages.—Millions of Africans have perished on this soil of blood.—You break at every step the bones of the inhabitants that nature had given to these islands, and you shudder at the relation of their vengeance.—In this dreadful struggle, the crimes of the Whites are yet the most horrible:—They are the offspring of despotism; whilst those of the Blacks originate in the hatred of slavery—the thirst of vengeance. Is philosophy chargeable with these horrors? Does she require the blood of the Colonists? Brethren, she cries, be just—be beneficent—and you will prosper.—Eternal slavery must be an eternal source of crimes;—divest it at least of the epithet eternal; for anguish that knows no bound can only produce despair.”

It is well known, that a large portion of the Proprietors or Planters of St. Domingo, consists of free People of Colour, or those who have some mixture of African blood.—This description comprehends every shade of complexion, from the slightest tinge of colour, to the original hue of the native African. Though many of this class of inhabitants are as distinguished by their wealth, as for their talents and integrity, the invidious distinction has always been religiously adhered to. The white Colonists excluded them from their social circles, from their assemblies, from their municipal functions; and continually held them in a kind of proscription.

* Speech of M. Brissot, in the National Assembly, 1st December, 1791.

The effects of this arrogance were not, however, injurious to the People of Colour. Insulted by their countrymen, they found the means of rendering themselves respectable in the eyes of their European correspondents. They were as remarkable for their industry and their punctuality, as the White Planters for their indolence and extravagance. In cases of internal insurrections, or external attack, they were regarded as the sole barrier of the island.—* “*The White Colonist*,” says Mr. Blanchelande, *cannot march without the attendance of his cooks; he is unfit for a continual service: but the Man of Colour, bare-footed, robust and temperate, supports without difficulty the hardships and fatigues of war.*”

In the contemplation of the French laws, the People of Colour had long stood upon an equality with the White proprietors.—By an Edict of Lewis XIV. in the year 1685, this equality was acknowledged and confirmed. Such was the situation of the Colonists at the time of the French Revolution. † “*At this Epoch*,” says Mr. Bergeras, “*the White Colonists advanced rapidly in the career of freedom; but the People of Colour trod back their steps towards slavery.*”

The situation of the French colonies early attracted the attention of the Constituent Assembly. At this time all was tranquil; at least as tranquil as such a state of oppression will permit. Political health can only be attributed to a country with a free constitution. The situation of the islands is that of a paralytic: one part is torpid, whilst the other is affected with the frantick motions of St. Vitus's dance.

The first interference of the National Assembly in the affairs of the Colonies, was by a decree of the 8th March 1790, which declared ‡ “*that all free persons, who were proprietors and residents of two years standing, and who contributed to the exigencies of the state, should exercise the rights of voting, which constitutes the quality of French citizens.*”

* Letter of M. Blanchelande, read in the National Assembly, Jan. 17th, 1792.

† Speech of M. Bergeras, in the National Assembly, 7th Dec. 1791.

‡ “*Que toute personne libre, propriétaire ou domicilié depuis deux ans, et contribuable, jouira du droit de suffrage qui constitue la qualité de Citoyen actif.*” Art. 4.

This decree, though in fact it gave no new rights to the People of Colour, was regarded with a jealous eye by the white Planters; who evidently saw that the generality of the qualification included all descriptions of proprietors. They affected, however, to impose a different construction upon it. The People of Colour appealed to common justice, and common sense: * it was to no purpose. The Whites repelled them from their Assemblies. Some commotions ensued, in which they mutually fell a sacrifice to their pride, and their resentment.—The *Amis des Noirs* have not been accused of any interference in these dissensions, to which it is however probable that the slaves were not inattentive.

These disturbances again excited the vigilance of the National Assembly. The necessity of some definitive arrangement was apparent; but the difficulty and danger of too violent an interference was not less so. In order however to relieve the Colonists from any apprehensions that the French Constitution was intended to be enforced in the Islands, so as to liberate or meliorate the condition of the slaves, a decree was passed on the 12th day of October, 1790, by which the Assembly declared, as a constitutional article, “*That they would establish no regulations respecting the internal government of the Colonies, without the precise and formal request of the Colonial Assemblies.*”

By this decree the Constituent Assembly not only disabled themselves from exercising any future discretion on the condition of the slaves; but, as far as in their power, tied up the hands of their successors from affording relief to that devoted race, or rescuing them from any tyranny that might be exercised over them. They were delivered over to their masters, who were at once their accusers,

* The arguments of their advocates upon this head are unanswerable. “*Je m’attache à cette expression generale toutes les personnes, et je demande si les hommes de couleur ne sont pas des personnes: alors, s’ils étoient propriétaires, domiciliés et contribuables, je ne vois aucune difficulté, je ne vois aucun raison pour leur refuser les avantages attachés à ces qualités.*”

Speech of Mr. Pétion, 11th of May, 1791.

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their judges, and their executioners; accountable for their misconduct to no human power. So far from opposing the aims, or fettering the authority of the Colonists, the Assembly became their accomplice in oppression, and sent armies of freemen to maintain the reign of despotism. All was in the power of the Colonists; and if they had only maintained unanimity among themselves, the blood of the negroes might have cried to heaven, but France had for ever shut her eyes to their sufferings, and stopt her ears to their lamentations.

Peace was not, however, the consequence of this decree. The proprietors, it is true, had obtained a legal right of tyrannizing; but the unfortunate question still recurred, *Who should be permitted to exercise that right?* On this head the decree was silent. New dissensions arose: each of the parties covered under a factitious patriotism the most atrocious designs. Assassination and revolt became frequent. *Mauduit*, a French officer of rank lost his life by the hands of his own countrymen. The unfortunate *Ogé*, a Planter of Colour, who had exerted himself in France in the cause of his brethren, resolved to support by force their just pretensions. He landed in the Spanish territory of St. Domingo, where he assembled about 600 mulattoes. Before he proceeded to hostilities, he wrote to the French general, that his desire was for peace, provided the laws were enforced. His letter was absurdly considered as a declaration of war. Being attacked and vanquished he took refuge among the Spaniards, who delivered him up to his adversaries. * The horrors of his death were the harbingers of future crimes.

These disturbances still increasing, the National Assembly found it necessary, at length, to decide between the contending parties. A long and violent debate took place, in which several members who had on other occasions dis-

* Il faut bien preter des crimes à celui qu'on veut assassiner avec le glaive de la justice. *Ogé* est mort martyr de la liberté et de la loi; car tout étoit pour lui, humanité, justice, décret. Le concordat l'a vengé; l'infamie ne flétrit plus son nom. Qu'elle flétrisse à jamais celui des tyrans.

Speech of Mr. Brissot, 1st of December, 1791.
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tinguished themselves by their talents, and their patriotism, opposed with a degree of warmth as pertinacious as it was inconsistent, the pretensions of the People of Colour. Their resistance was, however, unsuccessful. On the 15th of May, 1791, a decree was made, consisting of two articles, by the first of which the Assembly confirmed that of the 12th of October, so far as respected the slaves in their islands. It is true that the word *slaves* was cautiously omitted in this document, and they are only characterized by the negative description of "*men not free*," as if right and wrong depended on a play of words, or a mode of expression.

This part of the decree met with but little opposition, though it passed not without severe reprehension from a few enlightened members. The second article respecting the People of Colour was strongly contested. Those who were before known by the appellation of Patriots divided upon it. It was, however, determined in the result, that the People of Colour *born of free parents* should be considered as active citizens and be eligible to the offices of government in the islands.

This Second Article which decided upon a right that the People of Colour had been entitled to, for upwards of a century*, instead of restoring peace, may be considered as the cause, or rather the pretext, of all the subsequent evils that the colony of St. Domingo has sustained. They arose not indeed from its execution, but from its counteraction by the White Colonists. Had they, after the awful warnings they had already experienced, obeyed the ordinances of an assembly they pretended to revere; had they imbibed one drop of the true spirit of that constitution to which they had vowed an inviolable attachment; had they even suppressed the dictates of pride in the suggestions of prudence; the storm that threatened them had been averted.

* This decree after all was not the extension, but the restriction of a privilege. It was asserted in the National Assembly, that of 100 free Negroes, scarcely 2 would be found who could qualify under this title.

Speech of Mr. Rewbell, 7th of Sept. 1791.
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ed, and in their obedience to the parent state, they had displayed an act of patriotism, and preserved themselves from all possibility of danger.

But the equalization of the People of Colour stung the irritable nerves of the White Colonists. The descendants of slaves might have lost the resentments of their fathers; but the hatred of a despot is hereditary. The European maxim allows "*That they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong*"; but in the colonies this perversity attains a more monstrous growth, and the aversion to African blood descends from generation to generation. No sooner had the decree passed, than the deputies from the islands to the National Assembly withdrew their attendance. The Colonial Committee, always under the influence of the planters, suspended their labours. Its arrival in the island struck the Whites with consternation. * They vowed to sacrifice their lives rather than suffer the execution of the decree. Their rage bordered upon phrenzy. They proposed to imprison the French merchants then in the island, to tear down the National Flag, and hoist the British Standard in its place. Whilst the joy of the Mulattoes was mingled with apprehensions and with fears, St. Domingo re-echoed with the cries of the Whites, with their menaces, with their blasphemies against the constitution. A motion was made in the streets to fire upon the People of Colour, who fled from the city and took refuge in the plantations of their friends and in the woods. They were at length recalled by a proclamation: but it was only to swear subordination to the Whites, and to be witnesses of fresh enormities. Amidst these agitations the slaves had remained in their accustomed subordination. Nor was it till the month of August, 1791, that the symptoms of the insurrection appeared amongst them. If the notoriety of this fact require any evidence, it may be found in the Report of the Colonial Committee, in the letters of Mr.

* Vide letters of M. Blanchelande read before the Assembly, 22nd of August, 1791.

Address of the Syndicks of the Chamber of Commerce of Rouen, read the 7th of September, 1791.

Speech of M. Brissot, 1st of December, 1791.

Blanchelande,

Blanchelande*, in the speeches of the members of the assembly, in the publication which is the subject of these remarks. A considerable number both of Whites and People of Colour had lost their lives in these commotions before the slaves had given indications of disaffection—They were not, however, insensible of the opportunities of revolt afforded by the dissensions of their masters. They had learnt *that no alleviation of their miseries was ever to be expected from Europe*; that in the struggle for Colonial Dominion their humble interests had been equally sacrificed or forgotten by all parties. They felt their curb relaxed by the disarming and dispersion of their Mulatto masters, who had been accustomed to keep them under rigorous discipline. Hopeless of relief from any quarter, they rose in different parts and spread desolation over the island. If the cold cruelties of despotism have no bounds, what shall be expected from the paroxysms of despair?

To this crisis our present Inquiry is particularly directed, nor ought it to pass over with an unsupported assertion, or a probable supposition. The cause of the insurrection has been agitated in the National Assembly, long *after* the presentation of the Address of the Deputies. In the course of the debate, it was asserted, without contradiction, that all the Mulattoes, except those in the southern

* The letter, dated the 4th of September, 1791, from Mr. Blanchelande thus describes the commencement of the insurrection.

On the 22d of August the Colonial Assembly requested my presence at the examination of several persons, as well Whites as Blacks, who had been apprehended by the patrol. I was convinced from their depositions that a conspiracy was formed against the Colony, and particularly against the Cape. I learned that on the night of the same day, it was intended to burn several dwellings near the Cape, and to massacre all the Whites. On the morning of the 23d several persons from the country took refuge in the town. They brought information that many of the Black labourers had revolted, and that many Whites had been put to death.

Read November 8th, 1791.
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parts were disarmed by the Whites, and that the Negroes had revolted * *because those who had been accustomed to coerce them were incapacitated. Is it extraordinary, said the O-
rator, that the Slaves should revolt when they find the Mu-
lattoes disarmed; when they see them compelled to quit the
Cape, or be exposed to the most horrible punishments?* Even the Colonial Committee, though ever attentive to the representations of the Whites were unable to discover any other cause of the insurrection. After all the accusations of the Colonists, as well in the Address now under consideration, as in other intemperate pieces, they acknowledged that no proof had been adduced to them of the interference of the Society of the *Amis des Noirs*. *The White Colonists, say they, in their Report of the 11th of January last, have complained of the calumnies and outrages that appear in the writings of the Amis des Noirs. It is difficult to calculate what has been their moral influence; but hitherto there is no evidence that the Amis des Noirs have excited these troubles; and we have found all the accusations against them totally unsupported by proof.*

Before we proceed with our narrative, let us be permitted a reflection on the comparative state of the inhabitants of St. Domingo, at the time the insurrection took place. The White Colonists had just recovered their liberties, and were called upon to exercise the highest political rights, and prescribe for themselves their own constitution. The Slaves had been resigned up to their unlimited controul; all that despotism can wish for they enjoyed: paramount and uncontrollable themselves, they exercised uncontrouled and undefined authority over others. One only circumstance embittered their enjoyment of a power so gratifying to the perverted taste of man. They were required to share it with others, who, though equally free with themselves, equally competent to the exercise of it, and equally interested in its result, were unfortunately distinguished by a different shade of colour. Jealousy is inseparable from the lust of power, and a natural distinction served as a plea for restricting all authority to

* Speech of Mr. Brissot, 27th of October, 1791.

the hands of a few. The People of Colour remonstrated against this injustice. They represented the dangerous consequences that might arise not only to themselves but to the Island, if they were degraded in the eyes of their dependants, and compelled to contribute to the support of a government in which they were as passive as their Slaves. The decree of the 15th of May justified and confirmed their pretensions. But the hard gripe of Injustice relaxes not without force; and the White Planters avowed their resolution to suffer every extremity rather than submit to a measure that was indispensably necessary not only to their own prosperity, but even to their own preservation.

If such passions can agitate the human bosom, when required to share with others that power to which they have an equal right; if the People of Colour in asserting their claim to a seat in the Colonial Assembly, felt an impulse that set danger at defiance, and cheerfully encountered death, even in its most horrid forms; what shall we conceive were the feelings of the Negroes? The claims of the People of Colour had been recognized by the Parent Country; but the Negroes had been formally consigned over to the will of their Masters, without one stipulation in their favour. Political subordination, however hateful to a liberal mind, is as bright as day when compared with the dark and hopeless bondage of the Negro: a bondage that combines the pangs of intellectual misery, with the sufferings of a brute. Under these circumstances was it necessary for the *Amis des Noirs* to inform the Negroes that they were an unhappy and an injured race? Is it to be supposed they were unacquainted with the causes of contention amongst the Planters? and is not the love of freedom contagious? When they saw men whose wealth not only exempted them from personal labour, but supplied them with all the blandishments of luxury, contend at the peril of their lives for a share in the government of the Island, could they turn with indifference to the contemplation of their own numbers, and their own oppressions? It was not then the voice of the *Amis des Noirs*, it was the irresistible call of Nature that excited the Insurrection: the former would have soothed them to
peace,

peace, the latter hurried them blindly on to inevitable destruction.

In its commencement this insurrection was however by no means formidable; and the General Blanchelande has been accused in the National Assembly of pusillanimously entrenching himself in a town already fortified, when he should have led out his troops to suppress the revolt. "Whoever, says Mr. Brissot, advised him to this measure, has occasioned the ruin of the Colony." There is indeed little doubt but a vigorous exertion would soon have extinguished the flame. Even when the number of insurgents amounted to 50,000, and they had formed themselves into two bodies, an engagement of an hour destroyed the camp of one, and the other was totally dispersed by the discharge of a few pieces of cannon.

Avoiding the repetition of the disgusting barbarities alternately exercised by the contending parties, let us inquire what effect the insurrection of the Slaves had upon the dissensions of the Planters which had given rise to them. The White Party soon discovered, that although they could legislate without the assistance of the People of Colour, they could not preserve the Island from destruction without them; and they at length bowed their stubborn necks under the irresistible weight of their common danger. In thus calling for assistance upon those whom they had injured and insulted by every means in their power, they shrunk from that arrogant inflexibility of character which was expected from them. Amongst the conjectures that took place in France when information of the Revolt was first received there, we may notice that of the Reporter of the Colonial Committee.*
"Believe not, says he, that the White Creole will ever unite in the common cause with the Man of Colour, although they are both proprietors, and have both the same interests to defend. Even the imperious yoke of Necessity will bend under the odious prejudices against his origin."—"Nothing can efface the unjust distinctions which keep him at so infinite

* Report of the Colonial Committee, 27th October, 1791.

a distance, that the White would with less horror bear his enemies accuse him of a crime, than assert that a drop of African blood circulates in his veins. Such a reproach is considered as the most outrageous insult. He transmits his vengeance to his posterity, and hence originates that unquenchable hatred which is happily known only in these climates, in which the softest passions arise to an excess of phrenzy." The Reporter was, however, mistaken. Fear operates more forcibly than hatred, even in the breast of a Creole. On the 25th of August the Colonial Assembly condescended to invite the People of Colour to unite with them for the common defence. On the 2d, 3d, and 4th of September, they deliberated on the question of admitting them to their rights. The People of Colour in the mean time had armed for their defence, but had kept aloof both from the Whites and the Negroes. On the 11th of September a convention took place, which produced the agreement called the *Concordat*, by which the White Planters stipulated that they would no longer oppose the law of the 15th of May, which gave political rights to the People of Colour. The Colonial Assembly even promised to meliorate the situation of the People of Colour,* *born of parents not free*, and to whom the decree of the 15th of May did not extend. An union was formed between the Planters, which, if it had sooner taken place, had prevented the Insurrection. The Insurgents were every where dispirited, repulsed, and dispersed; and the Colony itself preserved from total destruction.

At the moment these transactions happened at St. Domingo, an important scene was acting in the National Assembly of France. From the time of passing the decree of the 15th of May, the White Colonists in France, and their numerous Friends in the National Assembly, had never ceased to accuse the authors of it of having conspired together for the ruin of the Colonies. In execrating its purport, and predicting its consequences, they had inflamed the minds of the resident Whites to the

* See Decree of the Colonial Assembly, 20th Sept. 1791.
highest

highest pitch of rage. The true Incendiaries of St. Domingo are to be discovered amongst the Colonists who, immediately after the decree of the 15th of May, failed for that Island to frustrate its publication, and oppose its execution. The Assembly had been weak enough to entrust the Colonial Committee with expediting the decree. In that Committee the apostate patriot Barnave had unlimited authority. The consequence was, that the first publication of the decree at St. Domingo appeared in the French newspaper called *The Monitor*. The instructions intended to accompany it were intentionally delayed till their effect was totally frustrated. Before the decree arrived, all was prepared for its reception, and the result was such as has before been stated. So far the White Colonists had succeeded in their aims. The predicted dissensions between them and the People of Colour had taken place, and all that now remained was to charge the decree of the 15th of May as the cause of that mischief, which the Whites had themselves voluntarily occasioned. Barnave and his adherents were indefatigable in their exertions, and almost in the very moment when the justice and necessity of the decree of the 15th of May had been acknowledged by the *Concordat*, the repeal of it was pronounced in the National Assembly. By the decree of the 24th of the same month of September, the People of Colour were virtually excluded from all right of Colonial Legislation, and expressly placed in the power of the white Colonists.* On this disgraceful measure it is only to be remarked, that it was as defective in point of legal authority as it was in abstract justice. For although it is denominated a *Constitutional act*, † it was passed fifteen days after the new code had been presented to and accepted by the King, and was the first infringement of a system of government, which the founders at least ought to have held sacred.

* ART. 3. Les lois concernant l'état des Personnes non libres, & l'état politique des Hommes de Couleur, & Negres libres, ainsi que les reglemens relatifs à l'exécution de ces mêmes lois seront faites par les Assemblées Coloniales.

† Speech of M. Fauchet, 12th December, 1791, and of M. Garan de Coulon, 2d March, 1792.

People

If the decree of the 15th of May could instigate the White Colonists to the frantick acts of violence before described, what shall we suppose were the feelings of the People of Colour on that of the 24th of September, which again blasted those hopes they had justly founded on the constitutional law of the Parent State, and the solemn ratification of the White Colonists? No sooner was it known in the Islands than those dissensions which the Revolt of the Negroes had for a while appeased, broke out with fresh violence. The apprehensions entertained from the Slaves had been allayed by the effects of the *Concordat*; but the Whites no sooner found themselves relieved from the terrors of immediate destruction, than they availed themselves of the decree of the 24th of September; they formally revoked the *Concordat*, and treacherously refused to comply with an engagement to which they owed their very existence. The People of Colour were in arms; they attacked the Whites in the Southern Provinces; they possessed themselves of Fort St. Lewis, and defeated their opponents in several engagements. A powerful body surrounded Port-au-Prince, the capital of the Island, and claimed the execution of the *Concordat*.* At three different times did the Whites assent to the requisition, and as often broke their engagement. Gratified with the predilection for Aristocracy which the constituent Assembly had in its dotage avowed, they affected the appellation of Patriots, and had the address to transfer the popular odium to the People of Colour, who were contending for their indisputable rights, and to the few White Colonists who had virtue enough to espouse their cause. Under this pretext, the municipality of Port-au-Prince required M. Grimoard, the captain of the *Boreas*, a French line of battle ship, to bring his guns to bear upon, and to cannonade the People of Colour † assembled near the town: he at first refused, but the crew deluded by the cry of Patriotism, enforced his compliance. No sooner was this

* La Cause des Troubles est dans l'inférieure vanité des blancs, qui trois fois ont violé un Concordat, que trois fois ils avoient juré de maintenir.

Speech of Mr. Brissot, 10th Feb. 1792.

† Report of the Colonial Committee, 29th Feb. 1792.

measure

measure adopted, than the People of Colour gave a loose to their indignation; they spread over the country, and set fire indiscriminately to all the Plantations; the greatest part of the town of Port-au-Prince soon afterwards shared the same fate. Nothing seemed to remain for the White Inhabitants but to seek their safety in quitting the Colony.

In the Northern Parts the People of Colour adopted a more magnanimous and perhaps a more prudent conduct.*
 “ *They began, says Mr. Verniaud, by offering their blood to the Whites. We shall wait, said they, till we have saved you, before we assert our own claims.*” They accordingly opposed themselves to the revolted Negroes with unexampled courage. They endeavoured to soothe them by attending to their reasonable requisitions, † and if the Colony of St. Domingo be preserved to the French nation, it will be by the exertions of the People of Colour.

After this recital of authentic and indisputable facts, is it difficult to trace the causes of the Insurrection? Is it to the *Amis des Noirs*—to the Society for abolishing the Slave Trade, that they are to be imputed? The sentiments of Mr. Brissot are those of all the true friends of the Negroes: ‡ “ *I challenge, said he, the authors of these calumnies to specify a single fact against the AMIS DES NOIRS. I will bow down my head on the scaffold, if it be proved that I have written a single line to the Colonies, or have supported any relation or correspondence with them whatever. I wish the situation of the Negroes mitigated, but not at the expense of the blood of my brethren. I should be unworthy of the liberty I enjoy, if I could advise a single Negro, to rise upon*

* Speech of Mr. Verniaud, 1st December, 1792.

† Dans la province du Nord les Hommes de Couleur, à l'exception de ceux de quelques paroisses, se sont comportés avec la plus grande prudence; toujours ils se sont empressés de combattre les noirs: toujours ils ont montré la plus grande confiance dans les décrets de l'Assemblée Nationale. Deux d'entre eux, M. M. Rouanet & Laforest, sont allés dans le camp des revoltés, pour y négocier la paix; leur zèle, les soins qu'ils se sont donnés, dans cette occasion sont au-dessus de tout éloge.

Report, 29th Feb. 1792.

‡ Speech of Mr. Brissot, Nov. 9, 1791.

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his Master; and it is detestable that they who know my principles and those of M. M. Petion, Roberespierre, Gregoire, Claviere, Condorcet, should be the authors of such accusations." In proportion as the sources of these calamities have been more distinctly traced, the White Colonists have felt the convictions of truth, and their advocates have been reluctantly compelled to acknowledge it. On the 10th of February, 1792, a letter was read in the National Assembly, from Mr. Poymonbrun, a Colonist of St. Domingo, in which he attributes the troubles to the pride of some of the Whites, who refused to admit the Men of Colour to the rights of active citizens. In the Report of the Colonial Committee of the 12th of the same month, they say, "*Without doubt the Colonists are not exempt from all reproach; but because some individuals are culpable, must the whole population be sacrificed? Should even that culpability affect THE MAJORITY, they must interest us even by their misfortunes, and call upon us for a moment to forget their errors and their crimes.*" May their distresses be alleviated; and may they learn humanity from their sufferings!

By the latest accounts from St. Domingo it appears the apprehensions from the Negroes have ceased; but that the inveterate prejudices of the Planters, and the effects of a culpable dereliction of principle in the Constituent Assembly, still continue to agitate it. *The disasters of St. Domingo*, says M. Tarbé (the Reporter for the Colonies) * *have now their principal cause in the misunderstanding between the Whites and the Mulattoes.*" "*In the Northern Parts*, adds he, *the Men of Colour have joined the Whites, and the Negroes are either reduced or rendered incapable of further mischief. In the Western Provinces not a Negro is in rebellion, but the Men of Colour have possessed themselves of many districts, and occupy the plains. The Southern Parts are in the same situation: the Negroes are at peace, but the People of Colour exercise the greatest enormities.* † *In one*

* Report, 29th February, 1792.

† En un mot, dans toute la Colonie, il n'y avoit plus rien à craindre des revoltés; tout de la mesintelligence entre les blancs et les gens de couleur. Report, 29th Feb. 1792.

word, adds he, throughout all the colony NOTHING is to be apprehended from the Negroes; EVERY THING, from the misunderstanding between the Whites and the People of Colour.

Such is the present situation of this Colony: a prey to the pride and to the prejudices of the white proprietors, not to the violence of the revolted Negroes. Whilst the fears arising from the latter, are, it appears, totally allayed, the former are still exerting every nerve to effect a purpose that can only end in their own ruin. Chastized, but not improved, in the school of misfortune, they now meditate a new outrage, and call upon the parent state to invalidate the *Concordat*, and to establish by force the pretended decree of the 24th of September. Shall then the advocates of peace, irrationally accused of the most atrocious designs, shrink from the question so insolently put to them by the Deputies of the Colonies, through the medium of the National Assembly? or shall they not answer with the conviction of truth—Yes, mistaken men. “ * *It is you who have placed fire and sword in the hands of your Negroes. It is you that have lighted the torch that has destroyed your plantations. It is you that have sharpened the daggers that have assassinated your brethren and your friends. It is you that have prompted the brutal passions of which your females have been the hapless victims: who have kindled in your country the volcano which has already covered it with ashes, and will perhaps reduce it to nothing.*”

If, however, no conclusions can be drawn from the history of these disorders, either to impeach the promoters of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, or to deter the British Parliament from daily considering, and fully deciding on that important measure; it will afford instruction of a different nature. Nourished in inveterate, and it will be feared, irremediable prejudices, it may shew us, that the Colonists are not the best judges even of their

* Particular Account of the Insurrection, p. 26.

own interests: it may apprise us of the dangers of sacrificing general principles of substantial justice, to variable and temporizing expedients: it may demonstrate to us, that the preservation of our own islands, from similar disasters, depends on the early adoption of measures, that whilst they are vigorous and decisive, are just, conciliatory, and humane; and may caution us, that where we choose not to impart the beamings of hope, we excite not the ragings of despair.

OBSERVATIONS

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

INSURRECTIONS

OF THE

NEGROES

IN THE

ISLAND OF ST. DOMINGO.

BY M. GARRAN COULON.

Read in his absence by M. GUADET before the National Assembly, 29th of February, 1792.

THE accounts received of the disturbances in St. Domingo, undoubtedly leave us in much uncertainty; but the principal facts are unquestionable. They reduce themselves to a small number of important and incontestible points. We ought at length to follow our own judgment and not rely upon others. It is by examining matters maturely, that we put ourselves on our guard against the spirit of party and dishonesty, which have frequently led astray the friends of liberty. By these means, the calumnious reports which have been propagated against the *Amis des Noirs* will be silenced.

The insurrection no sooner broke out than it was attributed to the *Amis des Noirs*. Nothing but rage and weakness could have produced so rash an accusation—Let them cite a single action, a single publication, which has provoked the insurrection. We surely need do no more than repeat

repeat the names of the principal members of this association, Messrs. Mirabeau, La Rochefoucault, Condorcet, La Fayette, &c. in order to do away these calumnies. An association formed at a more early period than ours exists in the capital of Great Britain. Ever since the formation of this society, philanthropick attempts have incessantly been the objects of its cares. Nevertheless, the Negroes in the English Colonies have continued to bear their yoke with the greatest submission—If then, we can at present with any certainty assign a cause to the troubles in St. Domingo they must be attributed to the degradation of the People of Colour, rather than to a Philanthropick Society. In fact, in North America, there is a religious sect which, without exciting disturbances, is continually, devising means for obtaining the enfranchisement of the Negroes. The Congress itself is preparing for the adoption of this measure at some future period, and there is only one of the American States where the traffick is not already abolished. Let us then attribute the troubles to the contagion of counter-revolution principles; and above all, to the injustice of which the Whites have been guilty in refusing to let the Mulattoes partake of the blessings of liberty; and lastly, to the culpable neglect of the enforcement of the decree of the 15th of May. Have we not, in the Constituent Assembly, seen deserters from the Cause of the People connect themselves with the Aristocracy to pave the way for the repeal of that decree, by preventing the departure of the Commissioners? And does not this evidently prove that those troubles have had the same origin as those of Avignon and the camp of Jalès? Like the Avignonais and the Liegeois, the People of Colour were oppressed, and they wished to become free; and these emotions have excited in the minds of the Negroes the same desire of independence. In like manner, at Paris, when the Bastile was taken, did not the prisoners in the Chatelet and the Bicêtre, break their fetters; These uncivilized men, who were nearer to a state of nature, were not deaf to the cries of liberty which resounded on every side. Perhaps too, the Whites have themselves excited the discontent of their Negroes: as we saw the court in 1789, when it had an army under its command, rejoice in the troubles at Paris, and as the King of Spain was pleased

at the revolt of the Portuguese; because it afforded an apt pretence for numerous confiscations.

At St. Domingo, the party inimical to liberty expected a counter-revolution, disorder and civil war (for a counter-revolution could result only from a general confusion) and the men of this party substituted the black cockade in place of the cockade of liberty, even in the very sight of the Colonial Assembly. But not even these proofs were necessary to discover the scheme of asserting their independence, which was formed by the planters of St. Domingo and Martinico. Before these troubles they had dared to decree, as a constitutional article, that the establishment of interior regulations belonged to the colony alone. Did not the former General Assembly of the Island of St. Domingo undertake to disband the army of the nation? In fine, did not these deputies, in the name of the colonies, threaten France with a separation similar to that which has taken place between the United States of America and England? Is it difficult to conceive, that men accustomed to despise their fellow-men, to subjugate them under the yoke of their despotick wills, *can* have no greater love for their country, than they have for equality? These same planters, who might have found so many advantages in their union with France, and whose deputies stiled themselves the deputies of the whole nation, pretended that the other deputies of France could not take a share in the formation of their laws; whilst, however, these men took a part in the formation of ours, their deputies effected a separation, and they returned only to repeal the decree of the 15th of May. The Constituent Assembly, which, in its old age, suffered the National Sovereignty to be trampled on, yielded to their sophisms, and pronounced the fatal decree of the 24th of September, the sole cause of all the disasters of St. Domingo.

In truth, the repeal of the decree of the 15th of May, had not taken place when the insurrection of the Blacks commenced: but the decree had been passed for the space of three months, without having been enforced. It was well known what struggles patriotism had made in order to obtain it, and it was well known *that* patriotism diminished

ed every day, that plots were formed to obtain the repeal of this decree, and that culpable hopes were founded even on the disturbances of the colonies.

These Observations which point out the cause of the misfortunes of St. Domingo, teach us that we ought never to suffer any infringement to be made upon the National Sovereignty; much less upon the rights of universal reason; they teach us that we ought to defend the planters themselves against their obstinate purpose of lulling themselves asleep to their own destruction, amidst the prejudices of pride,—in fine, that we ought to naturalize among them the character of citizen, by making them enjoy the blessings of the revolution. Let us then afford succour to the Whites, since they are unfortunate, let us grant them all the assistance that lies in our power. You would not refuse it to your enemies in a similar situation. But, here I stop—It is very true, that our most implacable enemies would not have had it in their power to do us more mischief: I will not mention the damage which they have done to our commerce, at a time when it had already experienced a considerable diminution—but can we forget the stains which they have brought upon our Revolution, the progress of which they have stopped by giving, under the reign of infant liberty, an example of the greatest injustice, by placing tyrannic laws by the side of the Declaration of Rights, when they caused the passing of the Decree of the 24th of September?

This Decree has deeply afflicted all the friends of liberty. Ought we to let it stand? Would it not be a proof of extraordinary weakness, were we to retain this law, which people have the audacity to term a *constitutional* law, although it was enacted after the constitution of the kingdom, and even after the constitution of the Colonies was framed? This law will tend to render the Planters independent of their French creditors; and shall we suffer the sovereignty of twenty-five millions of men to be trampled on, to support the tyranny and all the caprices of unrestrained despotism? Let the White Colonists at last know, that they cannot do without the mother-country; that she alone can free them from the misfortunes into which they have plunged themselves.

The criminal usurpations of the clergy and the nobility, and all the abuses of the royal power;—in a word, all kinds of disasters would follow upon the Decree of the 24th of September; and this independence would make the Colonies the centre of union for the aristocracy and the Counter-revolutionists. We are assured, that none of the reforms which the Constituent Assembly has made in the administration of justice, have been enforced at St. Domingo; that the most atrocious proceedings of the old government are still practised there; that Ogé was examined on the *sellette*, and that he was not allowed counsel. It is at least evident, that the liberty of the press, that guarantee of public liberty, the loss of which nothing can supply, has been proscribed; that arbitrary orders take place of laws; that Frenchmen have been transported without a trial, and under false pretences; that a vessel has been forced to dispose of its cargo, at a price fixed at arbitrary discretion. This is what the Colonial Assembly has done; you may judge what it would do in future time, were it invested with independent authority. The minister of the marine, after a long declamation against the *Amis des Noirs*, and the People of Colour, has already proposed to you a plan of establishing at St. Domingo, a national guard, composed only of proprietors; of erecting on that island certain fortresses, not to defend the coast, but to be made use of, as Rousseau says, in the interior part of the country, *as nests for tyrants*. In fine, if the Colonies, rendered independent of the legislative body, were to be connected with the king alone, what a means of confidence would the executive power derive from this exclusive right of giving its sanction! Being supreme chief of the army, he could still enslave it, by sending the most patriotic regiments into the islands, under pretence of establishing discipline there; but in reality, because in this exile, they would in vain appeal to the principles of justice and liberty.

If, however, you are determined to declare the Colonies independent, this declaration ought not to be made till the Decree of the 24th of September has been repealed, otherwise this independence would be extended to the Whites alone, who would preserve the means of perpetuating

petuating aristocracy. America emancipates its Colonies as soon as they are sufficiently populous; but she has expressly decreed, that they shall not institute an arbitrary government, or make any law in contradiction to the Declaration of Rights. In Greece, the parent states, when they allowed their Colonies to govern themselves, did not esteem themselves by that means freed from the obligation of defending the citizens of those Colonies against oppression. This reciprocal assistance, which kindred should mutually afford each other, we ought now to give to the citizens of Colour at St. Domingo, as well as to the Whites.

The Planters have formed a project of asserting their independence, in order to establish tyranny beyond the seas; *we ought to be wiser than they.* This separation might lead them to their ruin, and perhaps would not be so easy as they imagine; the dispositions of the English, of America, and still more their own experience, should convince them of this. If it be possible that the Colonies could be happy in this separation, on this supposition, the parent state must reap from it the same advantages as Price predicted, when the American Colonies separated from England. The commerce of England with the United States never was so flourishing as it has been since their separation. They who are most incrustured with the rust of ancient prejudices, do not dispute the advantages of this independence.—On this subject there is only one opinion. But since our Colonies still stand in need of the protection of the mother-country, since we are obliged to protect their internal freedom, we ought to agree to the laws upon which this liberty is founded. Distance does not prevent the National Assembly from making laws concerning their external regulations; and since the king can refuse to give his sanction to the laws for their internal government, why should not these latter laws be likewise submitted to the approbation of the legislative body? The laws, under the empire of reason, ought no longer to be the result of ancient prejudices respectfully accumulated, but the greater the number of enlightened understandings which concur in their formation, the nearer do they approach to perfection. Why
would

would the Colonies prefer the *Veto* of the king, to the opinion of the popular representatives of eighty-three departments, especially when this *veto* is not subordinate to the uniform will of three legislatures? Would they choose rather to be subject to the will of a minister who will always be ambitious to augment his authority? If this be their wish, why do they address themselves to the National Assembly, requesting our assistance? Is it not ridiculous to see them asking the representatives of a free people to support an arbitrary government—a government alien to our laws, and contrary to our constitution?

Our fleets, our armies, the product of our contributions, are no longer, as they formerly were, the patrimony of the monarch—they belong to the nation; they ought not to be made use of, except for the benefit of the nation, and conformably to the constitution. The king can require obedience from the troops of France, only in the name of the French laws, made by the representatives of the French people, and our armies are by no means subject to the laws of the Colonies. *If circumstances did not permit us to enfranchise the Negroes, nothing could authorise us to set up as constitutional principles the temporary measures which prudence might have suggested to legislators.* This is the reason why there exists not in the American constitutions a single article that gives a sanction to slavery; and the framers of this constitution, themselves proprietors of Slaves, perceived that they must leave to the maturity of time, to the progress of understanding and manners, the consummation of the destruction of slavery. On the contrary, a proposal is made to you, to annul the *Concordat*, or to temporize for the purpose of giving the Whites the means of annulling it by force.

I know not what can be expected from these dilatory measures, unless the involving in fresh miseries, the Whites, who have with difficulty escaped from the fury of the revolted Negroes. Will any one dare to assert, that the Decree of the 24th of September, of which they wish to avail themselves, is a constitutional article?

Let the French Constitution answer this question—a Constitution, all the principles of which it contradicts.—

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Let the Constitutional Decree of the 15th of May last answer it,—all the provisions of which it has infringed. We can hardly imagine, that the Constituent Assembly, notwithstanding all its power, could deprive a numerous class of free and proprietary citizens of their civil rights, especially without having summoned or heard them. If the exclusive *Initiative* had been granted to the Colonies on the 15th of May, it is evident, that, after this Decree, the Constituent Assembly could no longer make laws concerning the civil existence of any class of men, without having been formerly authorized so to do by the Colonial Assemblies.

In vain will it be objected, that an article of the Constitution declares, that the Colonies, although they form a part of the French empire, were not comprized in the constitutional laws of France.—What conclusion shall we draw from this? that the constitutional law of the 15th of May, not having been repealed by this article, cannot have been repealed since the completion of the constitution. I must observe, that the king having accepted the French Constitution, and that formed on the 15th of May for the Colonies; the Constituent Assembly could not trouble his throne with a new condition, which would occasion a loss of rights, and if a refusal of accepting the Decree of the 24th of September would not have occasioned a loss of rights; it follows of course, that it was not constitutional. The Constituent Assembly might reduce to principles the Constitutional laws which it had already made, but it could not make laws of a contrary nature.

Could we oblige the king, who had just sworn that he would maintain liberty and equality, to enforce a constitution which deprives a numerous class of men of the rights which nature gives them? Is it not evident that his acceptance of this decree could not have given it validity? and that, as an act of the legislative power, it is null, since it has not gone through the formalities prescribed by the constitution. Let us proceed to the examination of its contents: In the constitution we see that privileges no longer exist in any part of the French Empire; that the national sovereignty is indivisible and hereditarily delegated to

to the reigning family; that the colonies are essentially a part of the French empire. It was upon these principles alone then that the Constituent Assembly could determine concerning the constitution of the colonies. Nevertheless, their independence is declared in such a manner by the decree of the 24th of September that they are freed from the authority of the legislative body, and even from the authority of the constituent assemblies; and as the regal power is not comprised in this decree, the consequence is that the colonies might choose a king for themselves; but they will hardly imagine themselves independent of the authority of that inestimable article of the declaration of rights, which allows insurrection and resistance against oppression.


I may now confirm the timorous consciences of those who have asserted that they wished for the repeal of the decree of the 24th of September, but were afraid of infringing upon a constitutional law. But neither the people, who must ratify all constitutions, nor the Constituent Assembly, nor even the executive power, have ever looked upon this decree as truly constitutional. The Constituent Assembly did not present it for the acceptance of the King; and had it been constitutional, all the citizens, and particularly the deputies of this assembly, whose powers it would have limited, must have sworn that they would act in conformity to it. When you have produced from your archives the *constitutional act*, how happens it that not one voice has ever been raised to demand that the decree of the 24th of September also should be brought to the *Tribune*? This decree had been too recently passed, too sadly renowned to be forgotten; and if the nation had not refused to ratify it, whence comes it that among the loyal addresses which have been presented to the Constituent Assembly there has not been a single one in favour of this decree? The universal feelings, the spontaneous judgment of all the citizens, are better proofs than all the subtleties of argument, that this decree is not constitutional. Had it been so esteemed by the executive power, the minister of the marine would not have proposed to you different laws for the internal government of St. Domingo, for instance, for the establishment of hired guards, and of
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forts to be erected in the interior parts of the country. Let us then declare, that this decree is an infringement on the sovereignty of the nation ; we submit not to it either as citizens or despotics ; but as men we ought to detest it.

Mr. Garan Coulon then prepared the form of a decree abrogating that of the 24th of September ; declaring a general amnesty throughout the colony, enacting, that the Colonial Assemblies should be formed pursuant to the decree of the 15th of May, that they should give their sentiments on the subject of the internal government of the colonies, and on the best method of effecting the Abolition of Negro Slavery.

*Joseph T Ashford of
Providence Rhode
Island*

APPENDIX.
July 27th 1797



A P P E N D I X.

Since the preceding Inquiry was printed, Advice has been received, that the NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, on the 24th instant, passed, almost unanimously, the following DECREE respecting the COLONIES.

THE National Assembly acknowledges and decrees, that the People of Colour and Free Negroes ought to enjoy the equality of political rights, as well as the Whites, in consequence of which it decrees as follows.

ARTICLE I. Immediately after the publication of the present decree, they shall proceed, in every one of the French Colonies in the Windward and Leeward Islands, to the re-election of the Colonial and Municipal Assemblies, after the manner prescribed by the decree of the 8th of March, 1790, and the instructions of the National Assembly of the 28th of the same month.

II. The

II. The People of Colour, and Free Negroes shall be admitted to vote in all the Primary and Electoral Assemblies, and shall be eligible to all places, provided they possess besides, the qualifications prescribed by the 4th article of the instructions of the 28th of March.

III. Three Civil Commissioners shall be named for the Colony of St. Domingo, and four for the Islands of Guadaloupe, St. Lucia, and Tobago.

IV. These Commissioners shall be authorised to dissolve the present Colonial Assemblies, to take every measure necessary for accelerating the Convocation of the Primary and Electoral Assemblies, and therein to establish union, order, and peace: as well as to determine provisionally (reserving the power of appeal to the National Assembly) upon every question which may arise concerning the regularity of convocations, the holding of assemblies, the form of elections, and the eligibility of citizens.

V. They are equally authorised to procure every information possible, in order to discover the authors of the troubles in St. Domingo, and their continuation, if they have continued; to secure the persons of the guilty, and put them under arrest, and to send them over to France, there to be put in a state of accusation, by virtue of a decree of the legislative body, if that be found necessary.

VI. The Civil Commissioners shall be obliged for this purpose, to address to the National Assembly a dispatch in form, of the verbal processes which they may have made, and of the declarations they may have received, concerning the accused persons aforesaid.

VII. The National Assembly authorises the Civil Commissioners to demand the publick force, whenever they think meet, either for their own safety; or for the execution of orders they may give, by virtue of the preceding Articles.

VIII. The

VIII. The Executive Power is directed to send a sufficient force into the Colonies, which is composed in great measure of National Guards.

IX. The Colonial Assemblies, immediately after their formation and installation, shall issue, in the name of each Colony respectively, their particular judgment respecting that Constitution, those laws, and the administration of them, which will promote the prosperity and happiness of the people; conforming themselves nevertheless to those general principles by which the Colonies and Mother-Country are connected, and which their respective interests are secured, agreeably to the decree of 8th March, 1790, and the instructions of 28th same month.

X. The Colonial Assemblies are authorized to nominate Representatives to deliver their judgment to, and unite themselves with the Legislative Body, in numbers proportionable for every Colony, which shall be immediately determined by the National Assembly, according to the Report which its Colonial Committee is directed to make.

XI. Former decrees respecting the Colonies shall be in force in every thing not contrary to the present Decree.

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